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What Do 42 Wars Add Up To?

Less Than the Hardliners' Global Struggle With the Evil Empire

By Joanne Omang

A LOT of references are being made in Washington to the 42 wars, rebellions or civil uprisings supposedly going on around the world at this very moment. This oddly precise number is being used by hard-liners to argue that the United States, intent on preventing world nuclear holocaust, has been outmaneuvered in the Third World by the Soviet Union. A planetful of one-alarm fires has started, they argue, and must be dealt with swiftly if the flames of Soviet conquest are not to sweep the world.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger opened a January conference on low-intensity warfare with this observation: "Tonight, one out of every four countries around the globe is at war," Weinberger said. "In virtually every case, there is a mask on the face of war. . . . Behind the mask is the Soviet Union and those who do its bidding."

Leo Cherne, vice chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, picked up the thought in a February speech to the Defense Strategy Forum in Washington about intelligence requirements for the late 1980s. "Among the 42 current conflicts involving four million people engaged in wars, rebellions or civil uprisings, few nations have declared war upon another," he said. "This ambiguity . . . places a particular premium upon effective intelligence."

Speaking to the World Affairs Council of San Bernardino, Cal., in late January, Fred C. Ikle, under-secretary of defense for policy, noted that "For 40 years the world has been spared another global war. . . . Yet today, one out of every four countries around the globe is at war." He said the "driving, organizing force behind it all" is the Soviet Union.

This means that "containment has been outflanked," Ikle said in a recent interview, referring to the West's policy of preventing Soviet expansion beyond Eastern Europe

after World War II. "It worked in Europe and it worked in Korea, but it doesn't work in the Third World."

There have been other references to the 42 wars—by former United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and Sen. David F. Durenberger (R-Minn.), among others—but no one has spelled out just where the conflicts are.

Here is a list that is circulating at the Defense Department, where no one person or office claims authorship. It was compiled from public sources and not from secret intelligence data, according to department officials, who said the descriptions are only shorthand and are not intended as official pictures.

The list is also not completely current, the sources said, and is subject to change without notice. "If I sat down and assembled a current list, I would be amazed if the number were as low as 42," Cherne said.

Condensed, the list goes:

■ Sub-Saharan Africa.

Angola. Insurgency; high-intensity conflict.

Botswana. Low-intensity conflict; cross-border operations involving South Africa.

Burkina Faso. Intense conflict with Mali over border; ceasefire signed in early January 1986

Central African Republic. Low-intensity conflict with dissidents in north and Chadian commandos.

Chad. Insurgency; low-intensity conflict with southern commandos and Libyans.

Ethiopia. Insurgency; high-intensity conflict with insurgents in Eritrea and Tigre plus border confrontations with Somalia.

Lesotho. Cross-border operations with South Africa.

Mali. Intense conflict with Burkina Faso over border; ceasefire signed in early January 1986.

Mozambique. Insurgency; high-intensity conflict.

Namibia. Low-intensity conflict with South Africa.

Somalia. Low-intensity conflict with dissidents and border confrontations with Ethiopia.

South Africa. Low-intensity conflict with insurgents.

Sudan. Low-intensity conflict with dissidents in south.

Uganda. Low-intensity conflict with dissidents.

Zaire. Low-intensity conflict with dissidents in the east.

Zimbabwe. Low-intensity conflict with dissidents in south.

■ Asia and the Pacific.

India. Border skirmishes with Pakistan.

Pakistan. Small-unit actions on Indian border; problems with Afridis tribe; heavily armed bandits, and airspace violations by Afghan aircraft.

Sri Lanka. Tamil insurgent activity.

China. Conflict on border with the Soviet Union, and Vietnam.

North and South Korea. Cross-border operations; intense psychological warfare.

Burma. Insurgent activity and problems with narcotics traffickers.

Cambodia. Insurgents against Vietnamese and Republic of Kampuchea forces.

Indonesia. Insurgent activity; occasional border incidents with Papua New Guinea.

Laos. Problems with Hmong tribe, former Nationalist government troops, narcotics smugglers and bandits.

Malaysia. Low-level Islamic dissidence.

Papua New Guinea. Low-level border conflict with Indonesia.

Philippines. Continued insurgent conflict.

Vietnam. Forces occupying Cambodia and Laos are engaged in counterinsurgency.

■ Western Europe.

Ireland. Sectarian conflict.

■ Warsaw Pact/Eastern Europe/Mongolia/Afghanistan.

Afghanistan. Protracted conflict between Afghan resistance and Soviets/Karmal regime.

Continued

■ *Latin America.*

Colombia. Insurgency and acts of terrorism.

Ecuador. Nascant terrorism; insurgency.

El Salvador. Active insurgency.

Guatemala. Active insurgency.

Nicaragua. Active insurgency.

Peru. Acts of terrorism; insurgency.

■ *Middle East/North Africa/Persian Gulf.*

Lebanon. Civil war; Syrian presence; conflicts with Israel.

Morocco. Conflict with Polisario over control of Western Sahara.

Iran. War with Iraq; skirmishes with Kurds.

Iraq. War with Iran; Skirmishes with Kurds.

South Yemen. Coup attempt.

The usual first response to reading this list is immediate protest of its accuracy.

Where is Israel? Surely it cannot be called a nation at peace. And Libya is missing. Did we journalists invent all that blood? Perhaps terrorism has made the entire list obsolete, since it does not include any nation in Western Europe, where a lot of bombs have been going off recently. Great Britain is absent, although certainly a part of the Irish conflict; Spain suffers bomb blasts from Basque separatists; Kurdish rebels fight in southern Turkey.

And can all these African nations really be in flames? We thought conflict was even less than "low intensity" in Botswana, not to mention Lesotho and the Central African Republic and Zaire. We thought the cease-fire between Burkina Faso, nee Upper Volta, and Mali had settled matters there since the last time we dreamed about visiting Ouagadougou; why is it still on the list?

But a closer look at the list makes one wonder whether it supports the hard-line contention that it is a litany of Soviet conflict with America. By the military's own description, many of the conflicts appear to have no link to the communist bloc in any way. Others, such as the China-Vietnam and China-Soviet conflicts are fraternal battles *between* communists. Burma and Laos involve drug traffic; Malaysia, Pakistan, India, Ireland are sectarian or religious; the battles involving South Africa and its neighbors are racial ones. Many conflicts concern border disputes. Just as all politics is fundamentally local, no matter what the cosmic implications, so most of these wars are local battles, despite the major powers' meddling.

Those who cite the list would seemingly have us believe we are all missing World War III, just because it is not the kind we were expecting. For that reason alone, perhaps the most interesting fact about this list is that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States is on it.

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